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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Nepal begins with an overview of the role of English in the society in general, and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (preprimary, elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and teacher), the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English outside the educational system, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. Everyone in the educational system is aware that English language standards should be improved at all levels, but it is also perceived that low teacher quality, large and diverse classes, inadequate materials, a rote learning method, lack of funds for improving conditions and teacher education, and low priority for development of English instruction do not suggest a bright future for English language teaching in Nepal. An organizational chart of the Nepalese Ministry of Education is appended. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Nepal

Date: JUNE 1986

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1 ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

English is the main language of communication between Nepal and the international community. It is also the language of the tourist trade (the largest foreign currency earner), and of many international and bi-national agreements for the country's development. Many senior Nepalese are Anglophiles, several having been educated at English-style boarding schools in India. Children of wealthy and influential Nepalese parents still go to these schools. The King was educated at Eton; his Principal Private Secretary, responsible for education within the Palace, is a graduate in English from the University of Leeds. Although Nepal was not a British colony it has adopted, through India, many of the educational institutions and styles of Britain. English is considered essential in giving access to higher education outside the country and to books in most subjects.

The long-established British presence in Nepal, the continuing recruitment of Gurkhas and the close relationships of the two royal families all help to give Britain a favoured position in Nepal. This is further strengthened by a large training programme for Nepalese in Britain financed by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and the many British experts assisting major projects in Nepal.

Nepali is the medium of instruction in most schools but in the few schools where staff can teach in English they are encouraged to do so. Pupils may take the School Leaving Certificate in Nepali or English. English is taught from grade 4 (age nine). The standard reached by the best pupils at grade 10 is not high and there is a gap between the standard needed to pass the SLC and that required by courses at university where classes are taught in both Nepali and English but textbooks are often in English.

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Radio Nepal broadcasts news in English and many Nepalese regularly listen to programmes of the BBC Overseas Service.

Although two bookshops carry a large stock of books in English for pleasure reading, few people have either the reading habit or money to buy books. One of the aims of the British Council library is to create a long-term reading public. It is a lending library widely used by students from age fourteen. An English graded-readers section of some 4,000 books had a total issue of 36,126 in 1985/6. On a total bookstock of 17,000, with membership at 4,529, the issues for the year were 107,000.

English literature is not available in translation.

Many of the journals of University and Government bodies are written in English eg those of the Centre of Economic Development and Administration and the Nepal Administrative Staff College. Some authors publish in English eg Dr Hemang Dixit, Dr Harka Gurung, Abhi Subedi, Dr K P Malla and Rishikesh Shaha. Books in English are not reviewed in the Nepalese English press.

2 ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Pre-primary and primary education

There are many private nursery and primary schools which attract pupils by advertising themselves as English medium. English normally is taught from Grade 4 of the primary system (Grades 1-5). In the primary curriculum, six hours per week in grades 4 and 5 are devoted to teaching English. English accounts for 100 marks out of a total of 700 for all subjects in the end-of-year examinations. It is a compulsory subject from grades 4 to 10.

Lower Secondary (grades 6 and 7)

English continues to be given the same status in the curriculum as for the primary level.

Secondary (grades 8, 9 and 10)

The amount of time given to English varies between schools from five to seven hours per week, and continues to take one-seventh of the total marks in the final examinations each year.

School Leaving Certificate

This examination is taken nationwide at the end of grade 10. Students offer seven subjects. Because English and mathematics are compulsory there are many failures. A good pass in the School Leaving Certificate is essential for university entrance. There is no oral requirement for the examination. The standard of a pass in English at School Leaving Certificate level is not high and there is a gap in knowledge between school and university courses. The university runs remedial courses to bridge the gap.

English literature is not taught at School Leaving Certificate level.

The Cambridge International Certificate examinations are taken by a small group of able pupils who attend St Mary's and St Xavier's schools for one year (on a private basis) after completing their School Leaving Certificate. Results are very good.

Budhanilkantha School, a British-aided project, presented its first group of pupils for the Cambridge examinations this year. Eighteen of the twenty-four achieved first-class passes: the remainder second-class. The school will have its first A-level examinations in 1987. English literature is to be offered at O-level in due course.

Nepal has no inspectors of education. The Curriculum Textbook Supervision Development Centre (CTSDC) has three supervisors in English whose job covers the writing of materials, the management of short in-service programmes and checking new teachers. Each region has a cadre of supervisors.

The CTSDC is responsible for implementing the curriculum prepared by committees of subject specialists, teachers, teacher educators and university professors, and scrutinized later by policy-level personnel, and finally approved by the Co-ordination Committee chaired by the State Minister of Education. There is no printed syllabus. Teachers and pupils are expected to work through a set text each year. The elements of choice and emphasis demanded of teachers elsewhere are thus not encouraged: teachers aim to cover every aspect of English textbooks in a manner which is perceived to be inappropriate to the less accessible parts of the country, where it is felt that English should be taken as an optional and not a compulsory subject in the School Leaving Certificate. His Majesty's Government of Nepal is concerned that equal opportunities are available nationwide but will not make concessions to the weaker elements.

The English Department at Tribhuvan University is literature biased and interested in ideas rather than language. The Department feels that the teaching of language is more appropriately the task of the school system. The standard of spoken and written English is not high and it is difficult to see how students can appreciate literature. Set books are often unavailable and the Nepalese student often depends on cribs rather than reading widely. The university offers service English to institutes and departments and English for Special Purposes (ESP) materials have been produced for engineering, management, medicine, forestry and agriculture. A recent innovation has been the provision of intensive remedial English courses for students of the University. It is a three-year programme giving some ten hours tuition per week leading successively to junior, senior and advanced diplomas. Classes at the University are given in English and Nepali, the range of teaching in English being more limited the further one gets from Kathmandu valley. The skills in English required by Nepalese students are (in order of importance) reading, writing, listening, speaking.

Classes in the few vocational schools are given largely in Nepali. In the non-formal sector multinational and bilateral projects provide for some teaching of English eg the Unicef programme for the education of women.

There are no correspondence courses.

At present no formal qualification is required to teach within the state system. Pre-service courses are offered by the Institute of Education but numbers have declined: those students opting for a teaching career are not the best; they opt for science and medicine. Teaching is not well paid and has little social status and few prospects of promotion.

For a number of years the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with CTSDC, have sponsored a teacher-training programme by radio. In the present series there is an element of English for teachers of grades 6-7. Radio Nepal broadcasts 'English by Radio'.

3 TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Although in the past the Council has had ELT advisers and professors working within the school or university systems, the only input from the official British side in ELT now is three posts at Budhanilkantha School, one of which is Head of Department. One privately employed British teacher at the Campus of International Languages teaches remedial English to university students. Unicef have nine VSOs (Voluntary Service Overseas staff) on their women's education project and some thirty-eight Peace Corps volunteers teach English language across the country. The United States Education Foundation has one Fulbright Professor of English working with the Curriculum Development Centre of the University.

The last British ELT expert produced ESP materials for the five technical institutes at Tribhuvan University. At the time it was felt there was little commitment from the Nepalese to ESP, although the materials are still in use, and the post was not renewed. The Nepalese realized that the National Education System Plan of 1971, which concentrated on strengthening Nepali across the country, has left the system with a rapidly declining standard in the teaching and learning of English. The British Council has been working over the last eighteen months towards a project to improve English at grades 8, 9 and 10 in the secondary system. Seven short courses have been organized, three in Kathmandu and one each in Pokhara, Dhankuta, Surkhet and Silgarhi. The Kathmandu courses have been run in association with the American English Language Institute and those elsewhere financed by the ODA under the Education Seminar programme. All have had the approval of HMGN. The aims of the courses have been two-fold: to improve the teachers' own confidence in using English, and to show teachers a variety of teaching methods which they could apply to their own situations. The growth of interest in ELT and the keenness shown by the teachers themselves indicates a need for a permanent Council ELT presence and eventually a Centre for English Language Teaching as recommended in the Davies Report, perhaps co-financed with the Americans. Language must have priority.

The cost of getting the teachers to in-service training courses and feeding them must be borne by the organizers. The Ministry of Education budget for in-service courses is limited and consequently there are few courses.

Attempts to form an association of teachers have been robustly resisted by the government.

4 MATERIALS SUPPORT

Students in the secondary sector have to buy their own textbooks and supply their own writing materials.

Teachers and students at secondary and university levels use the British Council library for books on methodology and language and simplified readers. There are two good bookshops but not many Nepalese can afford to buy books. The United States Information Service (USIS) library, catering for third-year undergraduates and above, has a small ELT section and no simplified readers; this will change shortly. They are aware of the new emphasis on English teaching and will make a substantial input to their library to the benefit of English teachers and their students. No school (except Budhanilkantha) has a proper library. There is no tradition at school level of reading around the subject, only learning and reading what is required to pass an examination.

Teachers faced with an examination, a class of sixty students or more, no aids other than perhaps a blackboard and very little space, simply concentrate on getting through the book for the year. There is a desperate need for teachers' guides to enable all teachers to use the textbook to the greatest advantage.

Schools have no budget for teaching materials in English. Few have a projector, fewer still a tape-recorder.

English literature is not available in Nepali.

5 EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Within the Technical Division of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Secretary Dr N N Singh), the Curriculum Textbook Supervision Development Centre determines the curriculum, overseas the writing of textbooks, arranges short courses of in-service training for teachers and evaluates the system. The Director, Dr Kedar Nath Shrestha, has Joint Secretary rank. In the CTSDC, the English Section has places for three supervisors of which only two are taken at present, the third being on a Master's course in Edinburgh. Previously the American Peace Corps had volunteers in the CTSDC working on teachers' manuals but there is no-one attached now. The English textbooks were originally devised by an ODA-funded specialist (Eric Glendinning) but have since been substantially modified by a local expert.

6 DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

From the sixth century, when the earliest records start, until the eighteenth century, education in Nepal was associated with the monasteries and temples. Following the unifying conquest of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768, education became the concern of no-one in particular and was considered unnecessary.

With the advent of the Rana period of 1846-1950, education became the prerogative of the few - those closely concerned with the regime. Some European or Bengali tutors were emloyed by the families in power but there was no public provision of education. English featured in whatever education there was, since it was necessary to deal with the British colonial power in India. When the collapse of the Rana regime came there was no apparatus capable of running an educational system.

Since 1950 much progress has been made, particularly in building educational institutions. There were 310 primary schools in 1950; there are more than 11,000 today. There were eleven secondary schools in 1950 and 4,392 in 1983. Emphasis in the first decade of democracy was on the primary and tertiary sectors. Tribhuvan University came into being in 1959. Previously students had worked for the examinations of Patna University. (There are over 100 campuses of the University today.) There was much Indian influence in the curriculum.) English was taught from grade 3 of the primary system (grades 1-5). English was tested pre-1970 in two alternative papers, both demanding grammar, essay, story and letter writing, one translation and the other prose and poetry. Most of the textbooks in other disciplines were written in English.

1971 saw the introduction of the National Education System Plan (NESP) in which English took second place to the improvement of indigenous languages, in particular of Nepali as the national language. It is popularly believed that standards of English declined from that date.

For the last four years schools with staff who can teach in English have been given the opportunity to do so and the School Leaving Certificate can be taken in Nepali or English.

7 ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

There is one English Language Centre other than that run by the United States Information Service/English Language Institute (USIS/ELI). It was initially founded by the Church of the Seventh Day Adventists who retain an interest but the Centre is expected to look after itself financially.

The Centre has 942 pupils and eight teachers, one of whom is British. Classes are from 0630 to 0930 a.m. and 1630 to 1930 p.m. which means their students are largely from Government or University campuses. Fees are 225 NRs (Nepalese Rupees) for sixty hours, terms are twelve weeks and lessons are daily Monday to Friday. The books used are American.

The English taught is for general purposes, not English for Special Purposes or English Literature.

8 BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Until 1982 the British Council had a KELT adviser at the Curriculum Development Centre of Tribhuvan University. When his contract ended it was decided, in view of the lack of real impact our advisers had had on the system over a number of years, to take stock of the situation and discuss with the Ministry of Education where best we could make an input. About the same time there was pressure from the Nepalese side for our assistance in improving standards of teaching and learning English at school level. The British Council and ODA mounted a survey of ELT across the country with a view to setting up a major project to support rapid development in ELT. The recommendations of the survey were thought too ambitious and a series of seminars in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Dhankuta, Surkhet and Silgarhi were mounted instead to find out what the difficulties of teaching English in Kathmandu and in the remote areas were. It is hoped that this programme will lead to a viable project being put forward to HMGN and ODA. Teaching on the locally mounted and financed seminars is by locally based ELT teachers, and on the seminars outside Kathmandu by London-recruited staff.

The British Council recruits and supports locally two Category IV teachers of English, one of whom is Head of Department at Budhanilkantha School. Students are prepared for the Nepalese School Leaving Certificate and the Cambridge Overseas Certificate at O-level; A-level may be attempted in a few years time. In addition, one teacher of English funded entirely by the Nepalese is administered by the British Council. The school has 600 pupils (selected on merit) from across the country, half of whom are aided by scholarships. The school produces a magazine and full-length play in English each year.

In the limited space of the British Council office, Technical Co-operation (TC) trainees going to Britain are given intensive English to enable them to

meet the demands of their courses in Britain. At present there are eight courses, each of 100 hours, and eighty trainees per year. As preparation for major in-country courses for Radio Engineers of Radio Nepal and Irrigation Overseers in the ODA rural development programme, the Council has provided classes to improve the spoken English of the participants - some 250 hours for the Engineers and thirty for the overseers. In addition, ELT teachers identified and paid by the British Council locally give classes to other bodies in Kathmandu. So far this has involved teaching for UNDP (United National Development Programme), ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development), SATA (Swiss Aid), Sheraton Hotel and staff of the Russian Embassy. Classes have been given to new entrants of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as part of their induction course at the Nepal Administrative Staff College, two groups approximating 140 hours in total.

The Council does not support literature teaching locally other than through an annual lecture at the Nepal Literary Association Conference, the standard of which is low overall. In its cultural programme the Council has brought to Kathmandu three major Shakespeare productions over the last four years. Each production attracted an audience of about 2,000 people.

There is no market for British-produced ELT materials. Teachers at all levels use the resources of the Council Library in Kathmandu.

9 AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The American English Language Institute (ELI), sponsored by the United States Information Service, is centrally situated and offers courses in English for Nepalese up to a higher intermediate level. The ELI has 750 places and students must have the Nepalese School Leaving Certificate. Fees are 170 NRs (£6) for forty hours regular tuition or 400 NRs for eighty hours intensive tuition.

The ELI offers courses for staff of development agencies in Kathmandu including USAID, UNDP, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). The fees are U$14.50 per hour, irrespective of class numbers.

It also offers special courses such as English for Professionals, eg managers, Writing for Professionals for those who have to do report writing, and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation.

10 OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

The British Council has provided English classes for SATA, ICIMOD and one UNDP project. This programme is not likely to expand.

The British Council and the ELI have collaborated successfully in three courses for a total of fifty-three Nepalese teachers of English from Kathmandu. Further jointly sponsored courses are planned.

11 COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

There is little prospect of sale for ELT hardware, English books on the teaching of English, English textbooks or tapes. Salaries are low and people cannot afford expensive foreign books and other materials. One would expect better possibilities for graded readers.

Two schools are doing Cambridge Overseas GCE (GCSE) Examinations at O-level and the Council offers its facilities for six non-Nepalese students to do London University O-levels. There is unlikely to be any major expansion on these numbers for five years or so. By that time one of the regional secondary schools, the Gandaki School at Pokhara, will be doing Cambridge O-levels.

There will be a need for regular on-the-spot advice once a large ELT project is mounted. It will not be on a paid basis.

There is only one private language school in Kathmandu other than the English Language Institute. It is unlikely there will be much expansion in this area - people just cannot afford it.

As no Nepali can afford self-financing there is no demand for language courses in Britain. Most ODA-funded trainees need extra English tuition, and this is arranged by the British Council in London and paid out of TC funds.

The only English teachers recruited from Britain are those at Budhanilkantha School, a British aid project. HMGN funds one of three posts for teachers of English.

Nepal is planning to institute its own television service in 1986/7 and with that and the growing market in private videos there may be scope for ELT films. It is intended that the TV programmes should have a large educational component.

12 CREATIVE WRITING

The Literary Association of Nepal publishes articles in English in its journal, Literary Studies, on a variety of themes from world literature, and holds an annual conference.

There are no literary prizes for work in English.

Publishing is largely dependent on foreign publishers, mainly from India. British publishers are represented by staff from their Indian offices.

13 CURRENT RESEARCH

There is no traditon of research at Tribhuvan University. The main university library is under-provided for in English studies. The University has no formal or informal links with any university or college in Britain. It is difficult to conceive of a link being viable or desirable when the standard of a Tribhuvan University degree is estimated as the equivalent of A-level plus one year.

There are no individuals involved in innovatory or distinctive work as far as is known.

In 1985/6 the Council sent six trainees to Britain to study ELT. The same number is expected in 1986/7 with one visitorship for the Chairman of the English Subject Committee at the Educational Campus.

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15 GENERAL STATEMENT

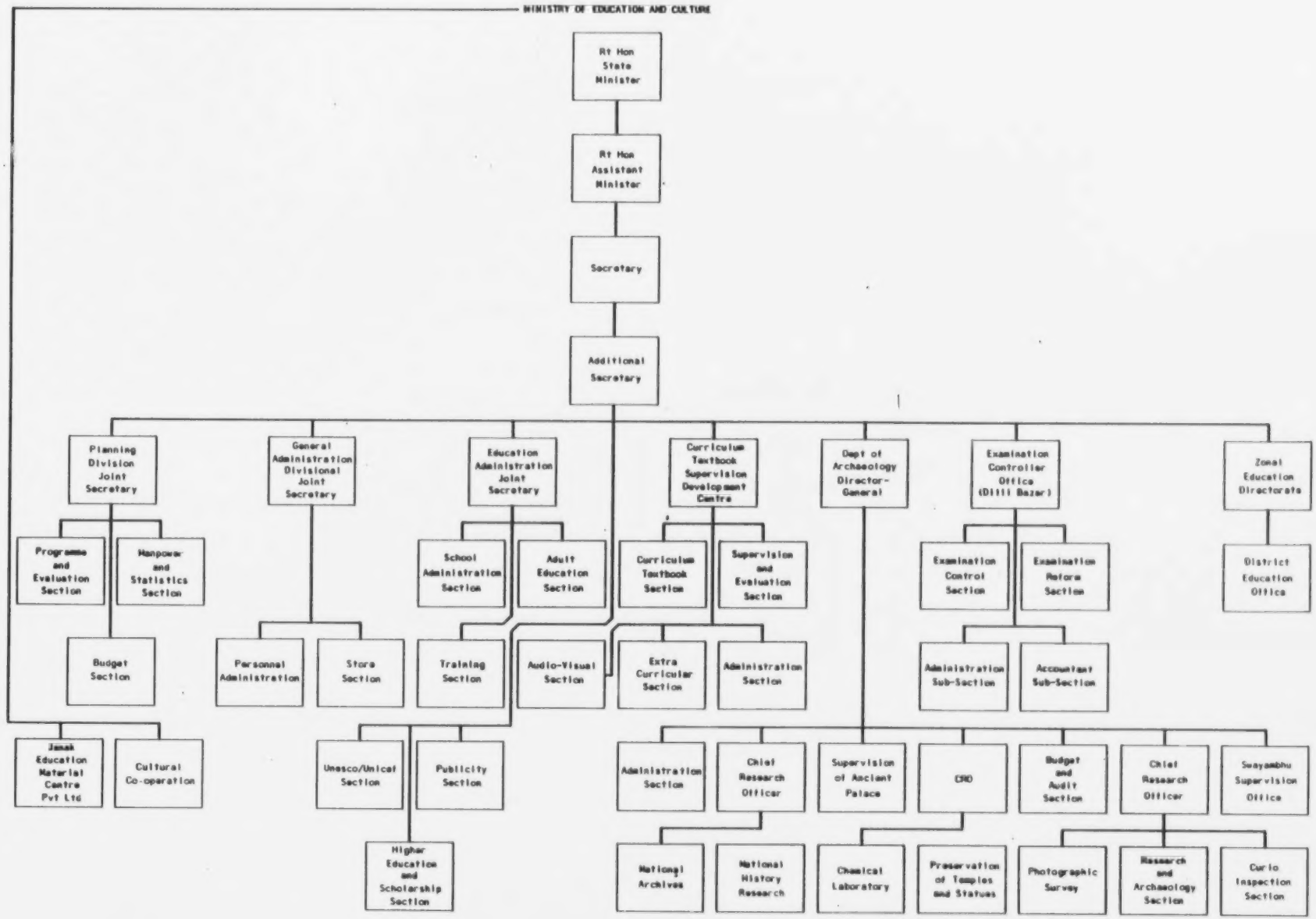
Everyone in education in Nepal is conscious that the standard of English at all levels of the school and university system must be improved. The difficulties are legion and it is not clear how many of these could be resolved.

Teachers have low status in the community and poor pay. They supplement their salaries with private teaching or some other means. The quality of teachers coming into the service has declined since teachers are no longer required to do a teaching certificate, and the best students opt for science, medical and engineering courses. As the private sector in school education grows, the better teachers will be attracted away from the state system.

Within the schools English classes are bedevilled by large numbers and a considerable age range in pupils, inflexible classroom furniture arrangements, a poor learning environment in general, insufficient books, no libraries, no teaching aids, other than perhaps a blackboard, and a traditional rote learning method which allows little scope for imagination and creative language activity. Often the teacher's own command of English is only just ahead of the pupil's. There is no chance, except in Kathmandu and perhaps Pokhara, of students reinforcing their work in English by further contact outside the classroom.

The authorities and the teachers are aware of this. The Ministry, owing to lack of funds, is unable to mount in-service courses to help remedy the position.

Pre-service training is negatively affected by: remoteness of campuses from the city and from schools; inadequate library and study facilities; low morale in the Faculty of Education English Department; lack of textbooks; poor quality trainees; absenteeism of tutors and students; too little concentration on teaching the language and too much, for example, on theoretical linguistics. It is difficult to see how this can be changed.



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